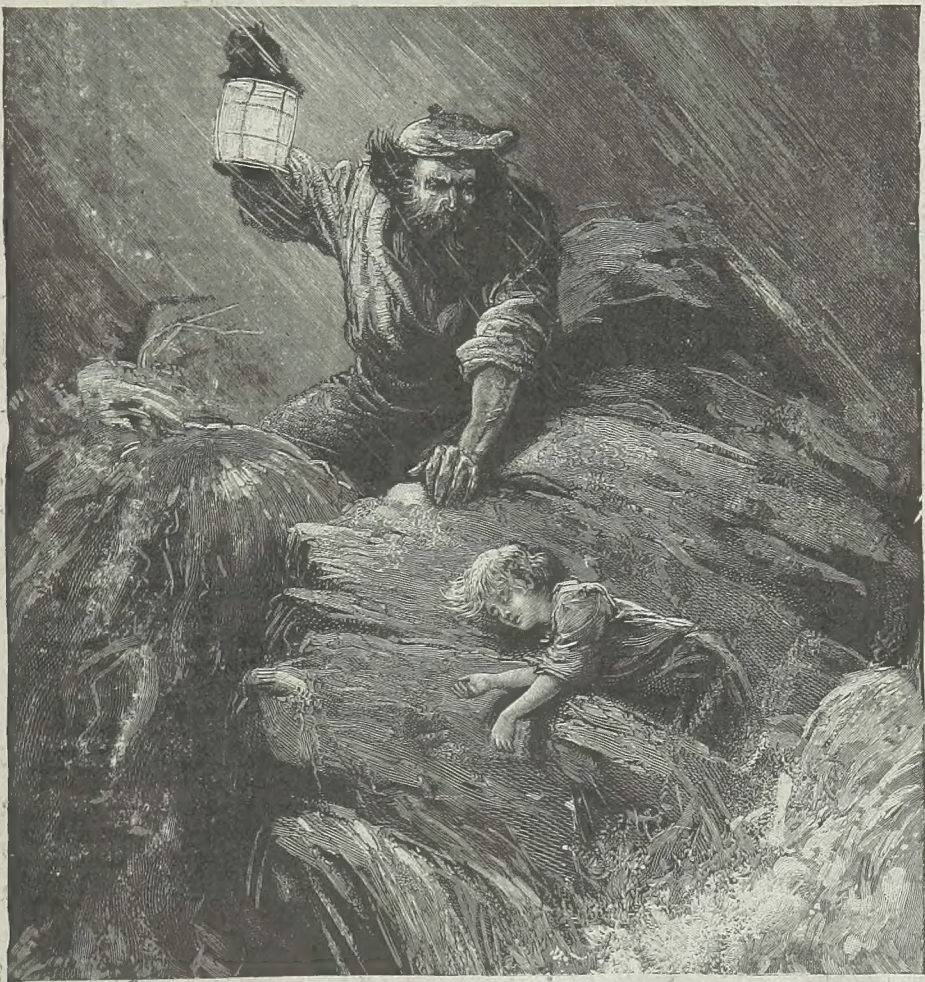


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ILLUSTRATED PENNY TALES.

FROM THE "STRAND" LIBRARY.



No. 8.—CONTAINING :—

IN THE MIDST OF THE SEA.

From the Italian of the Countess Bice de Benvenuti.

THE BLACK KNIGHT By Raymond Allen.

LADY FLORRY'S GEMS By George Manville Fenn.

PUBLISHED AT THE OFFICES OF "TIT-BITS."

GEORGE NEWNES, LIMITED, 8, 9, 10, & 11, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, AND EXETER STREET, STRAND, W.C.

SUNLIGHT SOAP COMPETITIONS.

232,000 Prizes of Bicycles, Watches, and **£41,904** Books, value

The First of these Monthly Competitions will be held on January 31st, 1894, to be followed by others each month during 1894.

Competitors to save as many "SUNLIGHT" Soap Wrappers as they can collect. Cut off the top portion of each wrapper—that portion containing the heading "SUNLIGHT SOAP." These (called the "Coupons") are to be sent, enclosed with a sheet of paper on which the Competitor has written his or her full name and address, and the number of coupons sent in, postage paid, to Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, Port Sunlight, near Birkenhead, marked on the Postal Wrapper (top left-hand corner) with the NUMBER of the DISTRICT Competitor lives in.



No. of District. For this Competition the United Kingdom will be divided into 8 Districts as under:

- 1 IRELAND.
- 2 SCOTLAND.
- 3 MIDDLESEX, KENT, and SURREY.
- 4 NORTHUMBERLAND, DURHAM, and YORKSHIRE.
- 5 CUMBERLAND, WESTMORELAND, LANCASHIRE, and ISLE OF MAN.
- 6 WALES, CHESHIRE, STAFFORDSHIRE, SHROPSHIRE, WORCESTERSHIRE, MONMOUTHSHIRE, and HEREFORDSHIRE.
- 7 NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, DERBYSHIRE, LINCOLNSHIRE, LEICESTERSHIRE, WARWICKSHIRE, RUTLANDSHIRE, NORFOLK, SUFFOLK, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, HUNTINGDONSHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, BEDFORDSHIRE, and OXFORDSHIRE.
- 8 ESSEX, HERTFORDSHIRE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, BERKSHIRE, SUSSEX, HAMPSHIRE, WILTSHIRE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, SOMERSETSHIRE, DORSETSHIRE, DEVONSHIRE, CORNWALL, ISLE OF WIGHT, and CHANNEL ISLANDS.

The Prizes will be awarded every month during 1894, in each of the 8 Districts, as under:—

Every month, in each of the 8 districts, the 5 Competitors who send the largest number of Coupons from the district in which they reside, will each receive, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gent's "Premier" Safety Cycle, with Dunlop Pneumatic Tyres, value £20*
 The next 20 Competitors will each receive, at winner's option, a Lady's or Gent's "Waltham" Stem-Winding Silver Lever Watch, value £4 4s.
 The next 200 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 5s.
 The next 300 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 3s. 6d.
 The next 400 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 2s. 6d.
 The next 500 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 2s.
 The next 1,000 Competitors will each receive a Book, published at 1s.

RULES.

- I. The Competitions will close the last day of each month. Coupons received too late for one month's competition will be put into the next.
- II. Competitors who obtain wrappers from unsold soap in dealer's stock will be disqualified. Employees of Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, and their families, are debarred from competing.
- III. A printed list of Winners of Bicycles and Watches, and of Winning Numbers of Coupons for Books in Competitor's District will be forwarded, 21 days after each competition closes, to those competitors who send Halfpenny Stamp for Postage, but in all cases where this is done, "Stamp enclosed" must be written on the form.
- IV. Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, will award the prizes fairly to the best of their ability and judgment, but it is understood that all who compete agree to accept the award of Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, as final.

* The Bicycles are the celebrated Helical (Spiral) Tube "Premier" Cycles (Highest award, World's Fair, Chicago, 1893), manufactured by the "Premier" Cycle Company, Ltd., of Coventry and 14 Holborn Viaduct, London, fitted with Dunlop 1894 Pneumatic Tyres; Eadbury's "Invincible" Lamp; Lamplugh's 405 Saddle; Harrison's Gong; Tool Valve, Pump, &c.

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£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
100	0	0	9600	0	0
84	0	0	8064	0	0
50	0	0	4800	0	0
52	10	0	5040	0	0
50	0	0	4800	0	0
50	0	0	4800	0	0
50	0	0	4800	0	0
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LONDON OFFICE: ST. GEORGE'S HOUSE, EASTCHEAP, E.C.

Illustrated Penny Tales.



From the Italian of the Countess Bice de Benvenuti.

I.

"WHAT can be the matter with Master Andrea?"

"Ah! he has not lighted the lamp!"

"Perhaps he has gone to sleep."

"Or been taken ill."

"Good heavens! What if he were to die out there all alone!"

"Oh, no! he can't be dead!"

"Let us hope not. It does not do to be always thinking of misfortune."

"True; but the light does not appear. We must go and find out what's the matter."

"It would be impossible to venture out now."

"We must go to-morrow. It is only right that someone should go."

This conversation was taking place between a group of fishermen on the coast of Roccamarina, their voices rendered almost inaudible by the roar of the tempest-tossed sea.

It was winter, and the night pitch dark. All eyes were turned from the seashore to the spot where rises the majestic lighthouse of Isolotto; for on that late hour of night not a gleam of light had been seen shining.

The lighthouse of Isolotto was not only a beacon to warn the mariner of certain dangerous rocks which lie beneath the waters around that spot; but it was almost a friend, a kind of star of hope to the residents of Roccamarina. Hence on that night their thoughts were of Master Andrea, the keeper of the lighthouse.

On the following morning, although the sea was calmer and the sky less threatening, yet not a sail could be seen on the horizon, nor did a single fisherman venture out from the shore.

Two stalwart sailors silently unfastened a boat from the port of Roccamarina, launched it into the sea, and pulled at the oars with might and main across the waves towards the rock of Isolotto. The distance was considerable, and they laboured hard, for the waves rose high, and the cold was intense. But these difficulties were not thought of; for their whole mind was centred on that man who, alone in the midst of the sea and, perhaps, in some dire trouble, might be wanting help and even wrestling with death.

A strange and unexpected reception awaited them.

"Who are you? What do you want? Where have you come from?"

Such were the questions, uttered in no gentle tones, with which the keeper of the lighthouse greeted the brave seamen.

"We have come for news of you," they replied; "but, Heaven be praised, you are safe!"

"News of me!" cried Master Andrea, in a voice of thunder. "News, indeed! Are you gone mad, to come out in such weather merely to ask how I am?"

"Pardon us, but you did not light the lamp last night, and at Roccamarina people were beginning to fear something had gone wrong."

At this point Master Andrea, who had not moved, and was solely occupied in pulling his long, black beard, should have assisted his friends to come in; but he hesitated, and at length came slowly forward, and with very bad grace and undisguised ill-humour helped them to land.

"So I did not light the lamp!" he growled. "That is not true; but even if it were, is it not allowable to forget for once? Suppose that I were ill, for instance. As for the rest, you are welcome to think what you please; I won't be troubled with you."

The two good seamen of Roccamarina were perfectly dumfounded at this welcome. However, from motives of prudence, they made no reply to Master Andrea. But when he added, "It will be better for you to return home; I have no need of you," they both resented his language.

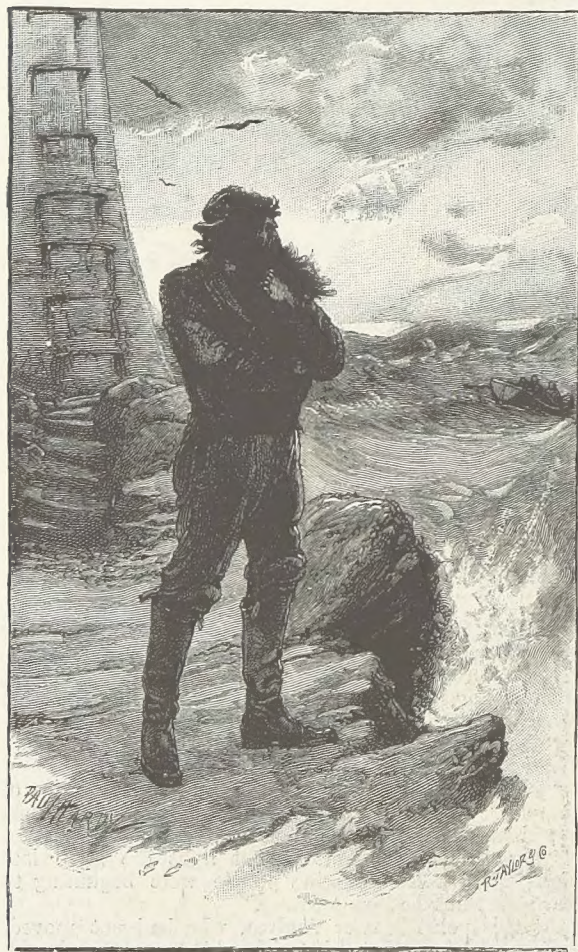
"We shall not return at once," they said, in a loud voice. "If you are so determined to order us away, we prefer to rest a while and warm ourselves at a good fire, and drink a good draught of wine before we return."

So saying, they resolutely leaped on to the rock, fastened their boat, and entered the little room which served Master Andrea as a kitchen. The latter slowly began to light a small fire, then drew out a bottle of wine, uncorked it, and set it down on the table with two glasses, without uttering a word.

In silence the bottle was drunk, the seamen warmed themselves as well as they could while the bits of fire lasted, and then, exchanging a few words in a low tone, they both rose to go, merely observing aloud that the sea had calmed down.



Whilst they withdrew, muttering that Master Andrea was the grumpiest being in the world, and that it was only losing their time to trouble about him, the keeper of the lighthouse stood on the farthest point of the rock, and followed the retreating boat with his eyes. He



"HE FOLLOWED THE RETREATING BOAT WITH HIS EYES."

was well pleased with himself, and perfectly satisfied, and he pulled vigorously at his great black beard, whilst a malicious smile passed across his countenance.

"So, so!" he said to himself! "So they think I am incapable! But what do I care what they think? I have succeeded in my scheme, and that is enough."

When the boat was well out of sight he ascended the stairs, quickly lifted the latch of his bedroom, gently opened the door, and stopped to listen attentively.

II.

MASTER ANDREA was one of those unfortunate beings whose life had known no smile. He had been brought up in idleness, yet without love, the child of a selfish, capricious mother, and a father who only knew how to grow rich, and was thoroughly heartless.

By the humble dwellers of Roccamarina, little Andrea was called from his childhood "Master Andrea," for he was the son of Master Antonio, and would, as an only son, come to inherit the busy blacksmith's forge on the shore, which yielded a good income with small trouble. In a word, he was a lad who was much envied, because it was known that, besides the forge, there was a good house and various farms which his father was purchasing in the neighbourhood, and that some day he would be the owner of some thousand *lire*.

How it happened is not known, but one day Master Andrea, who was in the city studying as a gentleman,

was summoned in all haste to Roccamarina. It was two years since he had been home, and he now learnt for the first time that his mother had died some months previously, without remembering him, or even leaving him a message, and that his father had just been drowned in the sea. He also found that the vaunted wealth of his father had mysteriously dwindled away, and that nothing remained to him but the duty of paying off his debts. The forge was sold, the beautiful house fared the same fortune, and the farms one by one all passed into other hands.

Two years after this catastrophe, Master Andrea, who had been always reputed a gentleman of means, found himself merely the owner of a small vineyard.

Averse to taking a position less than that of a proprietor, it seemed to him hard to go and seek work. Hence, when he made out his calculations and reckoned that out of this little plot of land he could obtain his daily bread, he said to himself: "Well, I am alone! I may have only dry bread and *minestra* to eat, but I shall be independent." And he proceeded to shut himself up in his small estate, fully intending to turn agriculturist.

He was covetous, and of a naturally melancholy character. He saw all things in a dismal light, and though still youthful, yet had no affections, and no hopes, not even a loving remembrance of bygone days, to cheer him. His parents had spent their married life in quarrelling with one another, and had often made him the innocent victim of their ill-humour. They had rendered his home perfectly unbearable, and therefore when he found himself far from them, and alone, he experienced a sense of peace and rest. And when in course of time this enforced coldness of a desolate hearth seemed to weary him, he had only to evoke the memories of the sad scenes he had witnessed in his childhood for his empty hearth and desolate existence to appear to him not only tolerable, but even pleasant.

But he was truly lonely. Not a relative, not a friend of the family had he to care for him! His parents had formed no friendships; and he himself knew not how to win them. The fact of his being better educated and in easier circumstances than the miserable fishermen of Roccamarina seemed to place a barrier around him; that talkative, active population, engaged in fishing and in traffic, and always in good spirits, could not understand how a young man should not draw his fellow-beings around him, and wrestle with his evil fortunes.

Master Andrea, from a wish to be left at peace, repelled all social intercourse, without taking into account that a man who lives selfishly for himself may free himself of many sorrows and trials, but that he also deprives himself of sharing the joys of human existence. He would not marry, fearing to bring trouble upon himself, and because he judged all women undesirable companions.

"Ah! you will soon experience the joys of a family!" he would exclaim bitterly, whenever the bells of Roccamarina merrily announced a wedding; and he truly felt compassion for the pair, although he did not know them.

In this way, leading a colourless, monotonous existence, he reached his fortieth year. He tended his vineyard, and read the newspapers and books with which a fellow-student regularly supplied him. But the vineyard responded badly to his assiduous care, and left him almost destitute; and books and newspapers no longer satisfied the cravings of his existence. The latter spoke to him of the needs of a social revolution, of the cruelty of the wealthy classes, of the inertness of the poor, and depicted the world in unreal colours; and, while assuming to care for the good of the people, instilled into the masses hate and distrust, rather than peace and love.

He became weary of himself, of his vineyard, and more so of the world from which he lived removed. One day it was rumoured that the aged keeper of the lighthouse of Isolotto had died, and that a substitute was wanted. In his present frame of mind it seemed

to him that it would be a desirable thing to go and live there in the midst of the sea, with his pipe, his books, and his papers. To those who said to him invariably, "Ah, Master Andrea, you'll soon see what a charming life that is!" he would reply coldly, that it was a matter of indifference where he lived. Nevertheless, he felt vaguely that a change was coming in his life, if no more than the new sensation that he had a daily duty to perform—a lamp to light! He sought and obtained the post, and to Isolotto he went.

For several years he lived contentedly, speaking to no one save once a week, for a few minutes on Sunday mornings, when the sailors brought him his provisions; and during this long term he had never omitted to light the lamp, except on the night when the fishermen of Roccamarina had so anxiously watched the sea and asked one another, "Is Master Andrea dead or ill?"

None of these anxious watchers could have guessed what unaccustomed thing it was that had happened to the keeper of the lighthouse of Isolotto.

III.

Two days previously, whilst the furious waves lashed the rock of the lighthouse as though it would be dashed to pieces, Master Andrea had been awakened in the night by the unusual sound of a human voice—a weak cry, which seemed close to him.

He rose hurriedly, and listened with attention. He descended to the platform, but he could see nothing. For a moment he thought he must have been dreaming; but no, that was not possible. Someone must have cried for help, thinking to save himself upon that rock to which the light had guided him.

Master Andrea grew anxious. "Who's there?" he shouted. He seemed to hear a sigh. Again he listened; and then determined to examine the rock. Lantern in hand, he hurried round it, and, to his surprise, discovered on a slant a child lying drenched to the skin, and to all appearance dead. He had been cast up by the storm.

"Was it indeed the storm?" he asked himself. "No," he thought, "someone must have placed him there for safety—his father or his mother; but whoever had done so had disappeared—had, no doubt, been drowned."

An hour later the little one was lying in the bed of Master Andrea, well warmed and wrapped in blankets, and was slowly recovering consciousness and vital heat. He turned round with a sigh, opened his eyes, and looked up, saying, in a weak voice, "Papa!" A hand tenderly stroked his brow, and mutely led him to believe that "papa" was really near him.

For the rest of the night and during the whole of the next day Master Andrea never quitted the child.

"He must be feverish," he cried, as he saw the little form toss and throw the clothes off his bed. "Oh, heavens! what if he were to die here amid the waves!"

This apprehension seemed to give him a strange discouragement. His heart beat anxiously, and he suffered acutely.

"No!" he cried, "I shall not let him be moved. I wish him to live and recover. I will save him!"

Wrapping the child up, he took him on his knee and nestled him to his breast as a tender mother would have done. A new sensation had come over him. That day he forgot the world, he forgot himself, and at night forgot to light the lamp!

In the morning the unusual noise of oars, announcing the approach of a boat, broke upon his abstraction. He stood up, sorely agitated. Might they not be coming to claim the child and take him away? A thousand voices seemed to be whispering within him: "*Do not let him be taken away! He belongs to you—he is your treasure-trove!*"

Hence, when he descended to meet his visitors he

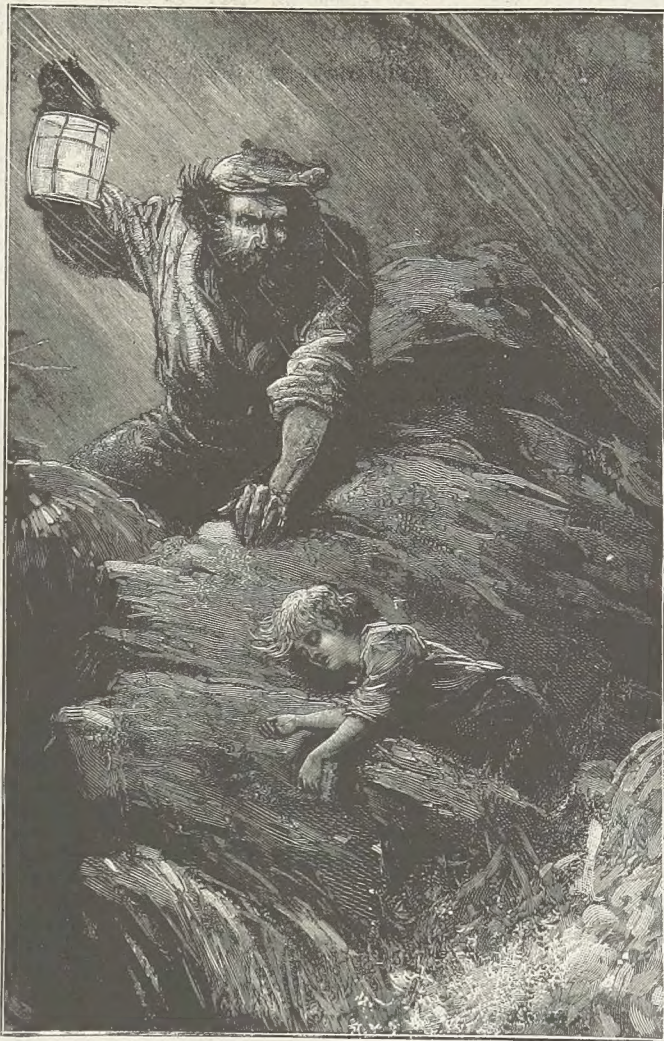
received them with the gruff reception already described. And scarcely had he freed himself of his unwelcome guests than he ran back hurriedly, as though he had escaped some danger.

The child slept soundly. On beholding that little, fair, curly head pressing the pillow of his bed, Master Andrea experienced a sudden feeling of intense joy, and he smiled, perhaps for the first time in his life!

A few days later the child, whom we shall call Carletto, had quite recovered, and formed a striking contrast, with his fair, winsome face of a three-year-old infant, to the sombre, black-bearded man whom he so charmingly persisted in calling "Papa."

There had commenced a new life for Master Andrea. He ran up and down stairs with the nimble little trotter to show him how he lit the lamp, and cleaned it, and put it out. He took Carletto on his knee and told him stories. He went almost without food in order that his pet should have the best of his allowance. Yet all this afforded him a new pleasure. And what of his anxiety to keep him concealed at any sacrifice? Ah! had the sailors who every Sunday morning brought his weekly provisions, and who landed on the rock of Isolotto, so much as suspected the existence of a child! But this fact Master Andrea was resolved upon keeping a secret, and thus he preferred to suffer hunger rather than ask for an increase of provisions, lest the sailors should demand the reason why.

For many months all went well. Master Andrea fasted without any ill effects, and from being selfish and moody he became chatty and merry.



"HE HAD BEEN CAST UP BY THE STORM."



"HE TOOK CARLETTA ON HIS KNEE AND TOLD HIM STORIES."

Only once a week was he inexorably severe with Carletto. On Sunday mornings he used to lock him up in the highest stage of the turret and refuse to release him until the boat from Roccamarina was well on its return. During the rest of the week Carletto was his tyrant, his idol, his joy, his very life. And as the possession of a precious thing induces the conviction that the possessor has a right to it, so did Master Andrea after six months had elapsed live at peace, without misgivings.

But one Sunday his visitors thought they perceived a rosy little face flattened against the highest window of the tower.

"I fancy I see a child's face!" said one of the sailors.

"Yes," replied the other, "it is a child's face!"

"Aha! so Master Andrea has a child up there!"

"Won't we chaff him about it?"

Both the seamen, as soon as they saw the keeper, commenced to chaff him about the child. But Master Andrea turned deadly pale; he trembled from head to foot, and made incoherent replies, until at last he was forced to tell the whole truth. How gladly he would have strangled those two importunate gossips! Yet when they listened to the story, they

became serious in their turn. Then they told him in reproachful tones that a poor lady from the neighbouring village passed day and night upon the shore stricken with grief, and awaiting the return of her husband and her child, who had gone to visit some relatives along the coast, and who had never returned. Carletto was, no doubt, the child of this sorrowing mother. Why had Master Andrea kept the affair so secret? Why? Did he perchance think that the child had fallen from the clouds? Did he not think that it might have a mother? Or did he judge that it was nobody's child?

Master Andrea heard all these reproaches in mute dismay. He kept his eyes upon the ground, and seemed as though he had turned suddenly to stone.

At length he looked up.

"Take him away!" he said, in a low, husky voice. "I did not think he had a mother. I do not wish to keep him from her. I could not! Quick! return and tell the lady that her child is safe. No! stay!—take him to her at once!"

Slowly, sombrely, like to one who complies with a duty that entails an immense sacrifice, he went up to seek Carletto. For a few minutes he kept him in the room. He took him up in his arms, he smoothed his little head, he clasped him to his breast and kissed him passionately, and clipped a curl of his light hair. Then, somewhat consoled by the tears shed by the child on parting from him, he carefully placed him in the boat.

When the boat was quite lost to view, he went indoors, and resolved to forget the whole adventure. He gathered together his books and newspapers, which had been of late sorely neglected, and sat down to read. All to no purpose. They seemed to tell him of the march of society, they spoke to him of a future inevitable social revolution, and in alarm he cried, "What will become of Carletto?"

Unable to repress the yearning of his heart, he would daily stand for hours looking towards the shores of Roccamarina. On all sides he was surrounded by the immensity of the ocean.

He felt he could no longer live "in the midst of the sea."

IV.

TEN months have passed. Master Andrea is no longer the keeper of the lighthouse of Isolotto.

He affirmed that living in the midst of the sea did not agree with his health; but the fishermen of Roccamarina declared that he longed to have his dense black beard pulled by the chubby hands of little Carletto.

Master Andrea lives in his paternal house tending the vineyard; but he is not alone. He has taken in the sorrow-stricken widow and her child, and labours day and night to support them.

He is perfectly resigned to his lot when he hears himself called "Papa" by the darling little fellow who, "in the midst of the sea," taught him how sweet it is to follow the commands of love.



The Black Knight.

BEING THE ACCOUNT OF AN EXCITING GAME OF CHESS.

By Raymund Allen.

A STORM of wind and rain had come on suddenly, and, as there were no cabs to be got near at hand, there was nothing for it but to set out on foot. I was going to dine with Colonel Bradshaw, whose acquaintance I had lately made at the local chess club, and I was due at half-past seven, so I pulled my coat collar up to my ears and started off through the muddy streets. Several times in the course of my exceedingly unpleasant walk the foulness of the weather had given rise to a wish on my part that I had invented some excuse for staying by my own comfortable fireside. Once arrived, however, the cheery welcome of the old soldier quickly dispersed all regrets for my own hearth, and restored me to the good-humour necessary for the proper appreciation of a good dinner.

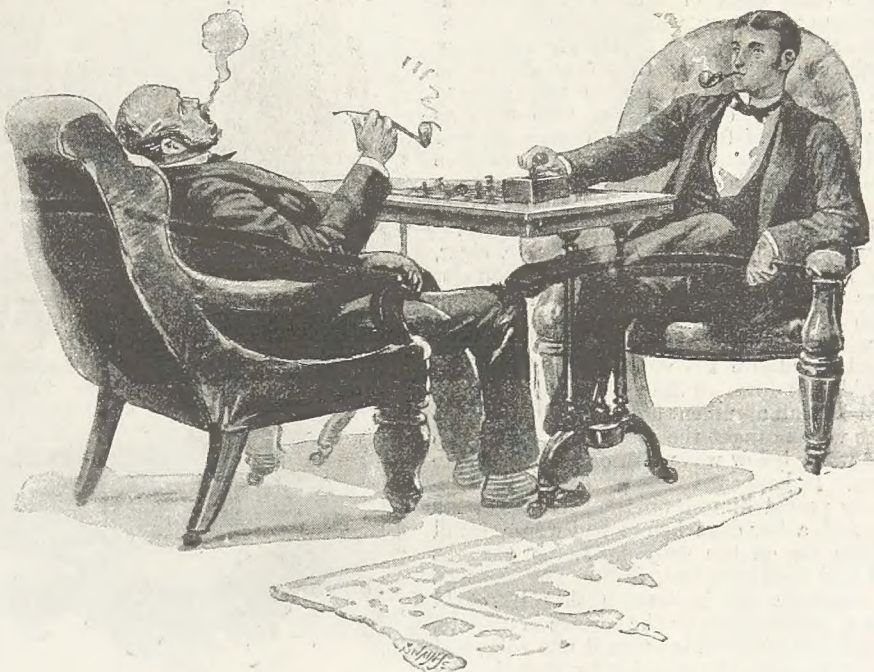
Colonel Bradshaw had served in India during the time of the Mutiny, had received a severe wound in the left leg, which still caused him to limp, and had led to his comparatively early retirement from the service. He had returned to England on his retirement, and had lately leased a snug little house in our town, which he apparently intended to occupy for the rest of his days in the quiet enjoyment of peaceful obscurity. I had made his acquaintance, as I have said, at the chess club, where, I believe, he used to spend most of his evenings, and where he had earned the reputation of a decidedly strong player. I had not as yet encountered him over the board.

In his note of invitation, the Colonel had asked me to bring my men with me, as he had left his own at the club-rooms, on the occasion of a match for which they had been called into requisition, and it was accordingly my set of chessmen which we now arranged in the customary order of battle. To my annoyance, however, I found that one of my black knights was missing, and I cast my eyes round the room in search of some article on which we might for the occasion confer the spurs of knighthood. On the Colonel's writing-table, acting as a paper-weight, I saw the very object we were in want of—a black knight. Not of the orthodox Staunton pattern, it is true, nor, indeed, were its grotesquely protruding eyes and maliciously grinning mouth characteristic of any pattern with which I was familiar; but still it was undeniably a black chess knight, and would serve our turn admirably. My host hesitated, and even seemed the least trifle annoyed when I suggested the expediency of pressing it into the service. The beast certainly looked incongruous among my Stauntons, but something in his human eyes and lifelike expression of malicious humour caught my fancy, and I asked to be allowed to play with the black men. The Colonel acquiesced, but declined the privilege of first move, which usually goes with the white. We accordingly drew for the move, and I won it.

Led partly by my

fancy for the black knight, and partly "to take my opponent out of the books," I began the game by making the paper-weight first take the field. As I did so, I fancied my host gave a little start, and, as he certainly appeared to be annoyed at my irregular opening, I was sorry that I had begun by a move which I supposed he objected to on the ground that it generally leads to a close game. He said nothing, however, and the game was continued for some time by very ordinary moves on both sides, and presently I began to be absorbed in the study of the position and in the endeavour to gauge the strength of my opponent. For a time he seemed to play a decidedly good game, and, in spite of continuous concentration on my part, to maintain some superiority of position. Presently, however, he embarked on a series of moves which appeared to give me a decisive advantage, and to have no more rational object than the capture of my swarthy champion at a ruinous sacrifice of his own pieces. This eccentric proceeding puzzled me, and, added to his previous hesitation about using the substitute, excited my curiosity. So, relinquishing the object of winning the game in the ordinary way, I devoted all my skill to the defence of my king's knight, as though it were a *pièce coiffée* with which I was pledged to give checkmate. Rooks were sacrificed for bishops, and bishops exchanged for inoffensive pawns, while the kings stood disregarded on their knights' squares, and the fight raged hotly round the black knight, who seemed to bear a charmed life and sprang nimbly about the board, always evading my opponent's headlong attempts at his capture. At last, in desperation, he offered the bribe of the white queen, but I obstinately refused to part at any price with my dusky cavalier, and a few moves later brought the game to a successful end with a smothered mate, the very bone of contention inflicting the death-blow.

The Colonel leaned back in his arm-chair and for some minutes continued silently to blow out thick clouds of smoke. After a pause, during which his brow was compressed into a frown, as though by the contempla-



"THE COLONEL LEANED BACK IN HIS 'ARM-CHAIR.'"

tion of some bewildering enigma to which he could not find the clue, he broke silence with the remark that "there were more things in Heaven and earth—" and then again relapsed into silence in apparent forgetfulness of my presence. As he made no further remark for some time, I rose from my seat, and, muttering something about its being late, prepared to take my leave.

"Wait a moment; look here," said the Colonel, rising to stop me with the air of a man who has formed a sudden determination, and pointing to the board, "I daresay you wonder what on earth I was driving at in that game?"

"Well, you appeared to me to be driving mainly at that outlandish black knight instead of at my king," I replied.

"Exactly, and perhaps I ought to apologize for having spoilt the game by giving way to an absurd fancy; but if you will sit down again and refill your pipe, I will tell you a curious experience which I had many years ago in India, and which you will perhaps admit as an excuse for my eccentric play to-night."

"Nothing I should like better," I replied; "for I confess you have considerably roused my curiosity."

"Well, then, I think I can partly satisfy it"; and my host threw a fresh log on to the fire, stretched himself in the chair, and began.

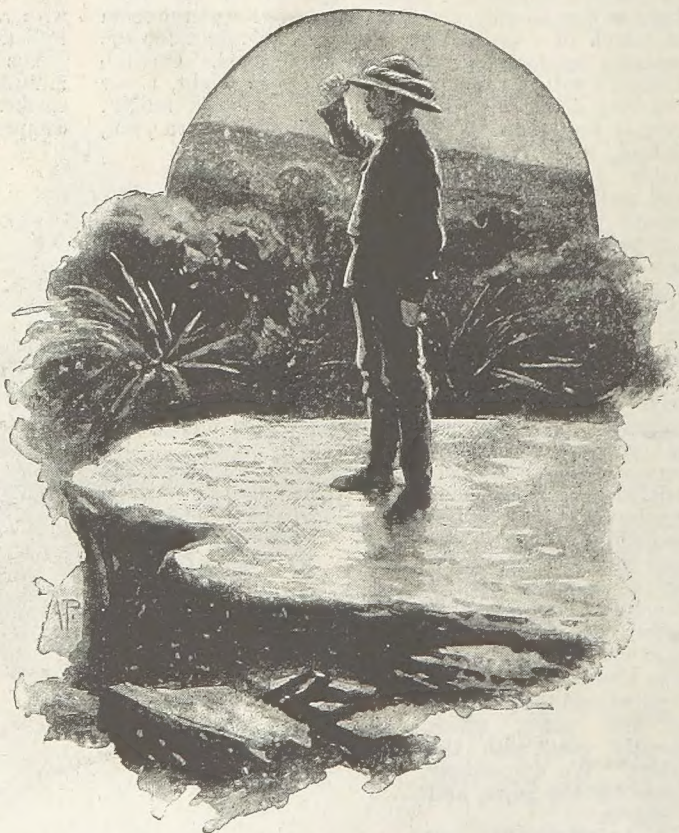
"I don't know whether you take any interest in such subjects as hypnotism, thought-reading, and so on; but, if you do, you may perhaps be able to form some scientific theory to explain my story. Personally I used to be very unbelieving in such matters, but my scepticism was considerably modified by the adventure I am going to tell you of. Very well, then. On one occasion in India, many years ago, I had got leave from my regiment for a few weeks in order to join a shooting expedition which had been got up by one of my greatest friends, a man many years older than I was then, and of much higher rank in the service. When, however, I arrived at our appointed meeting-place, I found my friend, the General, preparing for a more warlike excursion against a marauding tribe who had lately been extending their cattle raids across our frontier. The shooting expedition having fallen through, I readily accepted the General's suggestion that I should accompany his force as a volunteer, and see some sport of a more exciting kind. A common risk, even when comparatively insignificant, inclines men to readier cordiality towards the companions they may shortly be going to lose, and I was soon on excellent terms with the other officers, who were as pleasant a set of fellows as I have ever met. Nothing of any interest happened till we were across the enemy's frontier, and the force was encamped one night under a brilliant moon on a hill overlooking a thickly wooded valley.

"I was strolling round camp with a cigar, when I was joined by one of the younger officers, who, not being on duty, was refreshing himself after the day's march in the same way, and we continued our walk together. We stopped to admire the view at a point where we could look down on the valley, and presently we fell into an argument as to whether a bright surface which caught the moonlight in a glade of the wood below was water or a smooth slab of rock. It happened that my companion particularly prided himself on the keenness of his sight, and a few days before had won a small bet from me on the subject. I, too, thought that I had good eyes, and, feeling sure that he could detect a gentle ripple on the surface in dispute, I offered him a second bet that it was rock, and proposed to settle the question by myself going down to the spot. He accepted my bet, and, as

he was not at liberty to leave the camp, I gaily started down the hill alone, telling him with a laugh to have the stakes ready by the time I returned, and never for a moment supposing that I was running any risk in the affair.

"I rapidly made my way down over the short grass of the hillside, and marking the direction of the spot in question, soon plunged into the darkness of the wood, the cavernous depth of whose shadows was enhanced by an occasional glint of moonshine. I am not naturally superstitious. I have no particular aversion to midnight graveyards or haunted rooms, but I must confess I felt something like dread when I got inside that wood. Everything was absolutely dead and still. Not the faintest rustle of a leaf, not the creak of an insect, or murmur of water, but dense and awful blackness! It excited my nerves. I almost imagined I saw black shapes moving under the trees, though it was quite impossible that anything not luminous should show against such an inky background. I felt my way cautiously, stopping constantly to hear if anything was moving near me. What cracks the twigs under my feet gave! What a resounding crash reverberated in the gloomy shades when my foot set a loose stone rolling! My nerve was gone, and I felt horribly uncomfortable. I would gladly have paid my bet to be back again in camp, but I was bound to go through with my search now that I had once begun, as I should have made myself a butt for the wit of the regiment if I had turned back half-way to confess myself scared by the dark. After a longer time, and with more difficulty than I had anticipated, I reached the slab of rock, for such it proved to be. Here I was clear of the trees, and I stood for a few moments in the bright moonlight, so that my friend above, who I knew would be watching for me to emerge from the shadow, might see that it was not water on which I stood. Then I turned, and struck out energetically for the camp.

"I had not, however, pushed my way far through the



"IN THE BRIGHT MOONLIGHT."

undergrowth when I was tripped up suddenly by what I at first took to be some stout creeper or protruding root. I fell forward on my hands, and had not time to get on my feet again before I learnt that it was no accident which had overthrown me. Before I had time to offer the least resistance, or even to utter a shout for help, I felt myself seized round the neck by a grip like a vice; a few seconds more, and I was gagged, bound, and carried off through the forest, quickly, but in silence.

"As soon as subsiding astonishment left room for any other sensation, I felt a paroxysm of rage, as well against my own folly in running into such a trap as against my sudden assailants, whom I cursed none the less heartily for my inability to utter a sound. The futility of passion under the circumstances gradually subdued me, if not to philosophic fortitude, at least to sufficient calmness to speculate on my probable fate and on the chances of escape. For some time I seemed to be borne down hill and over irregular ground; then we must have merged from the jungle on to more even ground, for the pace became quicker and smoother. This may have gone on for some twenty minutes or half an hour, and then my captors came to a halt. I was set on my feet, and my eyes and mouth released from their bandages. This change of condition did not, however, conduce to my comfort or reassurance; for, while an armed native on each side held me firmly by my pinioned arms, a third presented a huge horse-pistol at my head at a yard's distance. For a few instants I endured an agony of suspense. I involuntarily shut my eyes, and waited for the bullet to crash through my brain.

"I have met many men who have at some time or other looked death pretty closely in the face, and you must often have heard it said that a man's mind at such moments reviews in a flash long periods of past time with an almost supernatural vividness of perception, but I didn't feel anything of this.

I only felt that I might be dead in another second, and then, with a determination to 'die game,' which was rather an animal sensation than an articulate thought, I set my teeth and opened my eyes to meet those of my enemy. The pistol was still directed at my head, and the grim Indian still kept his finger on the trigger. I faced him defiantly, and, as though unwilling to change a dramatic situation which interested him, he still kept the same menacing posture, while I longed for the flash and the end before my nerve should fail.

"At last he spoke. He spoke a dialect which I only imperfectly followed, but I understood him to say that if I tried to escape I should be shot on the

spot. I felt no confidence that I was not being reserved for a more horrible death, but the instinct of self-preservation kept me passive. When at last the pistol was lowered, and I no longer stood in momentary expectation of death, I looked round me and perceived that I was in the middle of a group of some half-dozen Indians, and as many horses. On to one of these latter I was lifted, and secured in the saddle by leathern thongs, my captors not choosing to give me the chance of escape by leaving me the management of my horse.

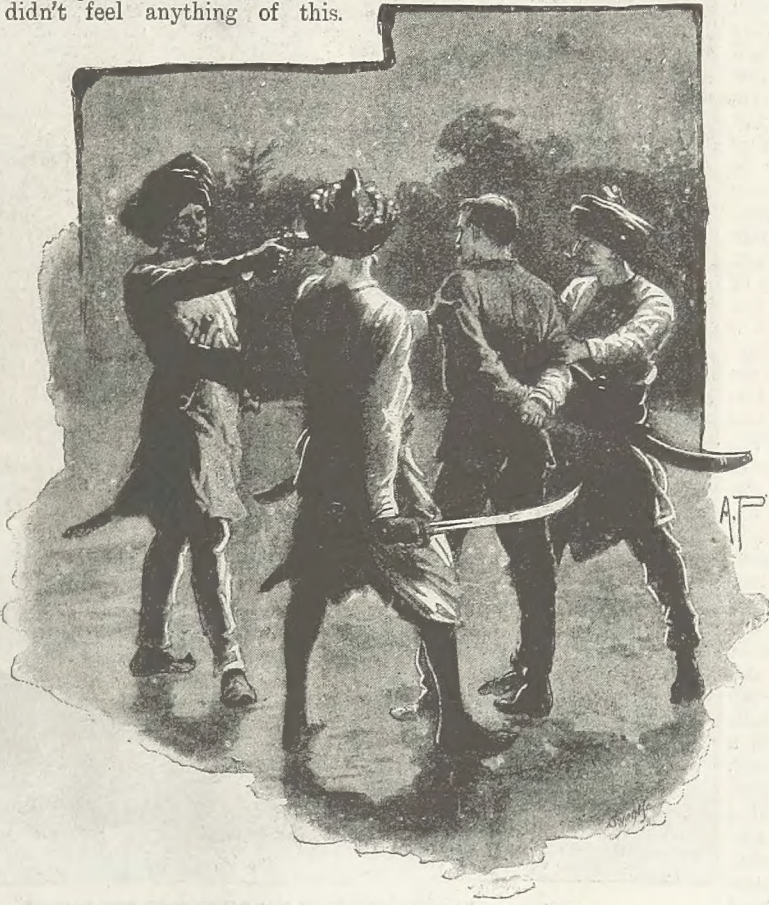
"After about an hour's hard riding, during which the rapid motion and the blowing of the cool night air on my face and hands acted as a sedative on my racked nerves, we reached the encampment of the hostile tribe against which the expedition had been sent out. And now came the strangest part of my adventures; the part which bears on my eccentric play to-night."

Here Colonel Bradshaw paused to stir the smouldering log in the grate to a bright blaze, and then, staring into the fire and keeping the poker in his hands as he leaned forward in his chair, went on with his story, more slowly at first, but with growing animation of voice, which gradually rose to the eloquence of excitement as he seemed to forget his immediate surroundings, and to live once again through the distant scene he was describing.

"The human brain," he resumed, "is incapable, I imagine, of continuing to experience any intense sensation for very long. It reaches the maximum tension, and then one set of perceptive faculties becomes deadened. The previous incidents of the night had exhausted my capacity for fear, and, as I was led before the chief of the tribe to hear his decree concerning me, I awaited the decision with indifference. I was keenly alive to every detail of my surroundings, and noted the expression of every face, and yet I seemed somehow to

have lost my own individuality; to be watching myself as an actor in a scene with which I had no personal concern, but only looked at from some outside point of view. The moon was now hidden behind a hill, but some twenty torches lit up the spot with their lurid flames. The party that had caught me had obviously been sent out to reconnoitre the movements of the English force, and the chief had been beguiling the time of their absence with nothing less than a game of chess.

"I was the less surprised at the nature of his pastime, as I knew that the game was widely spread in India, and had played it with natives myself, and knew in what points their game differed from our



"THE PISTOL WAS STILL DIRECTED AT MY HEAD

European rules. The chief's antagonist was a man whom I imagined—though I can't say exactly what suggested the idea—to be the priest of the tribe. He was shorter than the others, but his face suggested an extraordinarily active mind, and this, combined with his regularity of feature, would have made him a strikingly handsome type if it had not been for the fearful malignity of his expression. I wish I could give you some faint idea of that man's face, for it was the most terribly sinister face I have ever seen. His back had been turned towards me at first, but from the moment when I met the scrutiny of his black, deep-set eyes, which glared on me with a look of mocking, triumphant devilry that must have been borrowed from the fiend below, I was fascinated, and could see nothing but that one diabolical face. If there is any truth in the Eastern belief in possession by evil spirits, a demon looked through that man's eyes. A shiver ran through my frame as I met his gaze, and I felt that he was exercising some subtle influence over me, against which every fibre of my body, every atom of my being, stiffened in revolt. I felt that unless I exerted the whole of my will-force in resistance to the dread spell he was casting over me, I should lose myself in his identity, and become the creature of his wicked will. It was not physical fear that I felt. I had passed through that stage, and I believe I should have met death with firmness; but I felt that my whole personality was at the death-grapple with that fearful being—a mysterious, deadly struggle, fought in neither act nor word, with the powers of darkness impersonated.

"While all this was going on in me, the chief must have been listening to an account of my capture, though I was unconscious of any words being spoken near me, till the priest turned from me to him, and, pointing to the chessboard which stood on a sort of low table, made a suggestion which at first I did not fully grasp. Its meaning was soon made clear to me, however. I had some knowledge of their dialect, and most expressive pantomime conveyed the rest. I was to play a game of chess with the chief; the stakes, my life against a safe conduct to the English lines. Never before had I encountered so terrible an opponent, and never in the history of the royal game had so fateful an issue been fought out on the battlefield of the sixty-four squares. I took my seat opposite the chief, and the torch-bearers formed a wide ring round the table, looking, as the dancing torch-flames shone on their dark faces and limbs, like so many stalwart statues of bronze. Within the circle, and a little behind the king, stood the evil priest, motionless, with folded arms, including me and the board in his keen, hateful gaze. I knew exactly where he stood

before I looked at him, and again I felt the same dread fascination working on me that I had felt when I first set eyes on him. The chief moved the pieces indeed, but I was conscious in some subtle way that it was against his attendant's mind that I was pitted—that the former was scarcely more than an automaton under the thralldom of the priest's marvellous will, and the game itself only a sort of emblem or shadow of our inward contest of mind and personality.

"I played, appropriately enough, with the white pieces, and the game itself might have afforded an expressive symbol of the antagonism of the light and dark races, of the clear, bright West with the mystic, sombre East; but the thought did not occur to me then. To me it was rather a struggle between the intangible powers of good and evil—a realization in my own self of the eternal struggle of the universe. We played very slowly, and in absolute silence. No word was spoken nor sign made when either king was checked. Hour after hour the priest kept the same motionless posture behind his chief, who played with the same monotonously mechanical movement of the hand, the same vacant, mesmerized expression on his face. Hour passed after hour, unmeasured by any clock, unmarked by any change except in the position of the pieces on the board. The chief, or rather the priest, played well; and, though time after time I seemed on the point of gaining a decisive advantage, some unforeseen move always deferred my victory.



"PIECE AFTER PIECE WAS TAKEN FROM THE BOARD."

"One piece in particular repeatedly thwarted my combinations. Again and again it constituted the weak point in a series of moves which should have brought me victory. Again and again, when, after straining every faculty of my brain, I made my move and raised my eyes to watch in the priest's face the effect of a stroke to which I saw no reply, a faint mocking smile would curl for a moment his cruel lips, and the black knight would be moved once more, threatening dangers which I had overlooked, and dashing my premature hopes to the ground. It was as though some secret link existed between that particular bit of bone and the grim, ghoulish spectator of our game. Piece after piece was taken from the board and dropped on the sand at our feet; the ranks of pawns grew thinner and thinner, but still that one black knight, now the only piece left to my antagonist, sprang over the board, evading my deep-laid plans for his capture. The opening was long passed, the wavering fortune of the middle-game had waned with the long hours to an end-game. The inexorable moment which must decide my fate was close upon me.

"I turned for a moment from the board to ease the throbbing fever of my brain. A black veil of formless mist hid the stars and gave back the earth's heat, till I gasped for breath, and drops of nervous sweat ran down my forehead. There was a stifling oppression in the still air, as in the minutes before the first lightning flash darts from the charged thunder-cloud. The chief moved, and I spurred my flagging energies once more to the study of the game. Suddenly I seemed to be gifted with extraordinary powers of calculation. I shut my eyes, and saw mentally the position change through every possible variation like the moving pattern of a kaleidoscope. I could have announced a mate. I knew, to the exclusion of any doubt, that I must win. I made my move, and then, concentrating every particle of the hatred and loathing with which the diabolical priest had inspired me into one flashing look of defiance, I tried to hurl from me the cursed influence of his malignant spirit and to crush it into subjection to mine. His face changed with a hideous contortion of defeated evil purpose, and then the whole devil in him rose to one supreme effort in answer to mine. He passed his hand lightly across his eyes, and leaning over his chief scored his forehead with a malevolent frown, the glare of his glittering eyes seeming to pierce to the brain of the head they nearly touched. The new spell began to work on the chief. An uneasy, puzzled look came into his face, and this time it was with an uncertain, vacillating movement that he raised his hand to play. Again I looked at the priest. His expression was more bitterly mocking and more exultingly fiendish than ever as he directed my glance by a movement of his own to the hand which hovered over the board. His treacherous design was transmitted in a flash to my mind by some unexplained interaction of our brains. An illegal move with the black knight, in defiance of the rules of the game, was to snatch the nearly won victory from my grasp. I saw the fatal square on which the piece would be placed, and I felt that if it reached it I was lost. There were no spectators to

whom I could appeal against the glaring illegality, unconscious, no doubt, on the part of the hypnotized chief, and I should never be able to convince him afterwards of having won unfairly. I must prevent the move.

"The struggle entered on the final phase. I had shaken off the priest's mesmeric influence over my own will; now I must wrest the chief's will from the same thrall by the exertion of a counter-influence. It was the critical moment, the culminating point of conflict which must at last be decisive. The chief's hand raised the black knight slowly from the board, and as it began more slowly still to descend, I exerted all my power of will in one burst of straining endeavour to compel another move than the false one the priest intended. Every nerve in my body seemed strung to cracking. The wonderful sensation of my individuality, of the intangible essence which constitutes self, wrestling grimly for life with the demon-possessed priest, became intensified till my brain reeled. The chief's hand came slowly, slowly down; wavered as though uncertain on which square to place the piece. One final effort of will exhausted my faculties of brain and volition.

"The ordeal was over; light had triumphed over darkness as day had risen on night. I knew the priest's influence had been overcome, his spell cast off, without the evidence of the chess-board; I saw him fall backwards on the ground, every muscle of his body twisted in horrible contortion, as though some invisible power of the air were wreaking its vengeance on his ghastly, spasm-shaken form. The gruesome sight ended quickly, the violence of the seizure was resistless; the muscles relaxed, the limbs stretched out, and he lay a corpse.

"How I parted from my strange entertainers I can't tell you. I only know that the chief honourably fulfilled his pledge, and that, as I galloped away with a guide for the English camp, over the fair green earth, the woods and fields dancing to the breeze in the sunlight, the bright clouds carrying my thoughts to the depths of the blue expanse they sailed in, I experienced a new sensation of keen, ecstatic enjoyment of life for its own sake. All Nature seemed to have a fuller, better meaning to me than ever before—to be the physical expression of boundless power and happiness moving with all-inclusive purpose towards some eternal end; and I myself was filled with a thrilling vitality in the consciousness of being a part of the joyous whole."

The Colonel made a long pause, and then, with a reluctant sigh, as he dismissed the wide expanse of glorious landscape which lay stretched out before his mind's eye, to return to the commonplace of his immediate surroundings, he picked up the paper-weight from the board, and replacing it on the writing-table, concluded:—

"Later in the day, and after my return to the English camp, I found this little fellow in a pocket of my coat. Whether I had put it there myself or how it got there I don't know, and to what extent the incidents of the night were coloured by my own excited imagination is a chess problem I must leave to your own solution."





By George Manville Fenn.

I.
CREAK! *crawk!* And then *thud! splish! splash!* and a horrible echoing, whispering sound, as the water drawn up by the two men at the winch rose some ten feet higher, where each bucket in turn was caught by a check and reversed, to pour its contents into a huge cistern to supply the drinking water at the Castle.

I, Charles Lester, had climbed the down after my early morning visit to the sea beneath the cliffs, where a plunge into the clear depths had sent an electric thrill through me. There I had swum and dived for ten minutes, dressed in the warm sunshine, and tramped back over the cliff slope where Lord Gurtleigh's flock of Southdowns were nibbling the short, dewy herbage, and giving their mutton a gamey flavour by crunching up the thousands of tiny snail-shells as well.

I was satisfied with the look of the flock, laughed to myself as I thought what a farmer, bailiff, and general man of business I was growing in dear old Dick's interest, and had then gone round so as to pass through the gardens and let the men see I was about.

"I know they'll call me a nigger-driver," I said to myself, "but they've all had too easy a time of it during Dick's minority, and things have been shamefully neglected." And then I mused on my plans respecting the management of the estate as I went back to the Castle, making up my mind that, as Gurtleigh had placed everything in my hands, I would have none but good men about the place. Everything should be honest and aboveboard; and so it fell out that I was walking back to my room, through the yard, at seven o'clock that bright summer morning, meaning to do a couple of hours' writing and account reading, when I heard the squealing and creaking of the wheel in the well-house with its high-pitched roof.

I turned sharply, entered the great stone-paved, wet place, where a man was grinding away on either side of the opening, and came plump—that's the correct word, and his appearance justified it—upon Brayson, the butler, standing there, slowly sipping a tumbler of water, and looking as clean-shaven and smooth as if he were by the sideboard in the dining-room, waiting at one of the meals.

"Good morning, sir."

"Morning, Brayson. Stop! Look here, my men, why, in Heaven's name, don't you grease that wheel?"

The men ceased turning, and the one nearest touched his forehead.

"Be no good, sir. Her squeal again dreckerly, all on account o' the water."

"Then, grease it again, or oil it, or something!"

"Never have been greased," said the man on the other side, slowly, and in a way which seemed to say, "What business is it of yours?"

"Then let it be done before to-morrow morning," I said, sharply. "The whole of the machine is eaten up with rust. Where's your common-sense, men? Why, your work will be as easy again. Do you do this often, Brayson?" I said.

"Every morning, sir," he replied, obsequiously. "Winter and summer, I always have a glass of this water first thing. Finest drink in the world for your health. Will you try a glass, sir?"

"Well—yes."

Before I had finished speaking, he was rinsing the tumbler in a freshly filled tub; then, taking a clean napkin from his pocket, he wiped and polished it; finally, as one of the buckets rose out of the black, vaporous depths of the opening inclosed by the framework of the winch, he signed to the men to stop, and dipped the glass full, holding it for a few minutes in the open doorway, while a frosty dew rapidly formed on the outside of the tumbler.

"There, sir," he said, solemnly, and he handed it to me as if it were a glass of his lordship's choicest champagne.

I took the glass and drank its contents.

"Capital water, Brayson."

"Finest glass in the country, sir."

"And nice and cool."

"Always the same, sir, winter or summer. Comes from so deep down. It's just a hundred feet."

"Now, after the dry weather?"

"Never alters, sir; just keeps to the same height, and there's about eighty foot of water down there; never-failing supply."

"Humph; cut right down the solid chalk," I said, as I gazed into the black depths of the huge shaft, which was about ten feet in diameter, and breathed the cool, damp air which rose.

"Yes, sir, and she's never foul," said the man nearest to me. "I've been down when they mended the bottom wheel. Can't do that at Sir Romney's place; two men choked there only last year."

"Year afore," growled the other man.

"Oh, weer it? So it weer."

Then the winding went on as I peered down into the gloomy place, listening to the dull, heavy plunge of the buckets as they reached the water, and then to the echoing, splashing, and hollow musical sound as the water streamed and dripped back when they rose.

"Clumsy arrangement," I said, as I turned away with a shudder; for the place was creepy and terrible and strange. "There ought to be a force-pump turned by a pony or a donkey, as at Carisbrooke. Oh! by the way, Brayson," I continued, as I was crossing the yard toward the gates, "I want to go over the wine-cellar."

"The wine-cellar, sir?" he said, and his fat face changed colour.

"Yes, to take stock. His lordship talks of laying down a fresh supply. Have your cellar book ready, and we'll begin at once." There was a slight dew on the man's face, or I fancied there was, and I said to myself, as I went round to the front:—

"Master Brayson has been helping himself to a few bottles of port, and I've got to find him out. Deuced unpleasant, all this running tilt at the servants. I wish I had gone on reading for the law."



"THERE, SIR," HE SAID, SOLEMNLY.

valuable cellar of wine, which has been shamefully plundered. What have you to say?"

His lips moved, but no words came.

"Nothing? Well, I have a little to say. Give me your keys. I shall have the plate examined at once. His lordship will be extremely loth to have you prosecuted, but you must leave here; and I can only say, how could you be so mad as to throw away so good a post?"

"Oh, for God's sake, forgive me, sir!" he cried, passionately, and crying now like a child. "I'll confess everything, sir. The plate is all right, sir—I swear it is, sir; but I did take a little wine."

"A little, man! Hundreds of dozens are missing."

"Yes, sir, it's true, sir; but have mercy on me, sir. I'll turn over a new leaf, sir, and be the best servant his lordship could have, sir. I did sell some wine, sir; I was tempted, sir. No one ever wanted to know about it before in all these years."

"And now the day of reckoning has come."

"Yes, sir; but I will mind, sir. For Heaven's sake forgive me, sir. I've a wife and family, sir; and it's ruin to me. You know it is. I can never get another place with a character like that. I'll be the best of servants, sir. I'll be your slave, sir, and I'll confess everything, sir, and show you what's been going on in the stables, and at the farm, and in the garden, and about the hares and fezzans, sir."

"I can find out for myself," I said, sternly; "and Lord Gurtleigh wants an honest butler, not a contemptible, tale-bearing spy."

"Of course, sir; of course. But, Mr. Lester, sir, have mercy on me, sir. Indeed, I'll turn over a new leaf."

"Then go and turn it over, man, and don't grovel before me in that way. Let me see that you do repent. But, mind this, if the slightest act of dishonesty comes to my ken, there will be no more mercy."

II.
AFTER breakfast I rang for Brayson, and began my inspection of the wine-cellar.

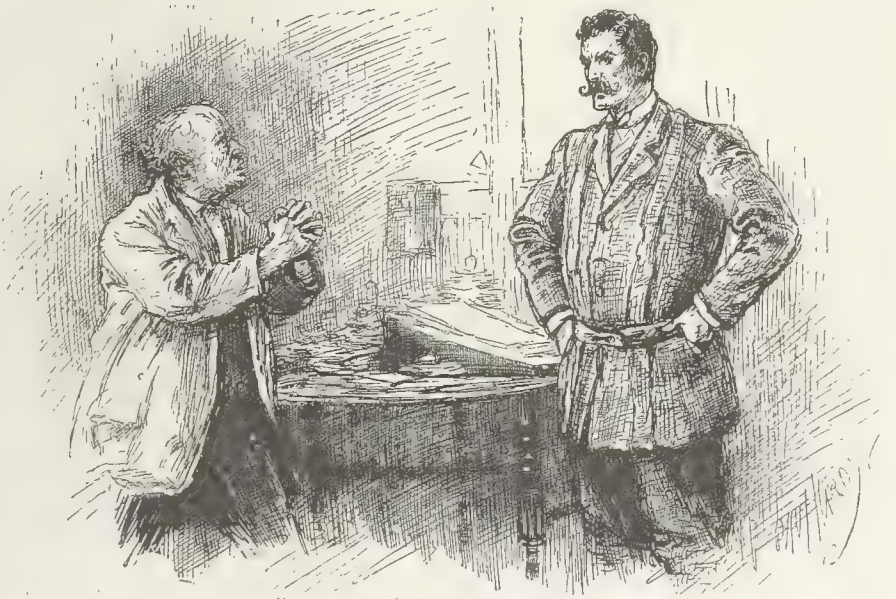
That took up the greater part of four days. Result: I had Brayson into the little library which was given up to me as my office, Lord Gurtleigh having merely reserved to himself the right to come of an evening and smoke a pipe.

Brayson came in, looking very pale and sodden. In those four days he had lost flesh; and, as he stood before me, the miserable wretch perspired profusely and was trembling.

"Now, look here, Brayson," I said, gravely, "you are aware that Lord Gurtleigh has placed everything in my hands?"

"Yes, sir, his lordship told me so."

"Exactly. Well, I am very sorry to have to exercise my prerogative so soon; but I must make an example. You were in the late Lord Gurtleigh's service fifteen years, and for the past seven years you have had sole charge of that



"FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, FORGIVE ME, SIR."

"God bless you, sir; thank you, sir," he sobbed out. "I—, I—."

He could say no more; but broke down, and stood with his face working.

"Sit down, Brayson, till you are more composed," I said, quietly. "There is cold water in that carafe; take some. Don't let the servants see you in this condition."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," he whispered, hoarsely, and the glass tapped against the bottle as he poured out some water and drank it.

"Weak, drinks more than is good for him—excepting the cold water from the well every morning to steady his nerves," I said to myself as Brayson had gone. "Well, I hope he will turn out right, and that I have made a friend."

III.

THE months glided on, and after a great deal of anxiety I could honestly feel that I was getting Gurtleigh's little kingdom into a fair state, when one night we had a shock. I was in the little library, poring over some papers sent down by his lordship's solicitor, about which a reply was needed. I had been speaking to Dick about it over our coffee, and he had replied: "Well, you know best. Don't bother me! Go and get it done, and then we'll have a quiet cigar. I'll join you in an hour."

He joined me in half that time, dashing into the library excitedly.

"Charley, old man!" he cried. "Quick, there's something wrong!"

"What!" I cried as excitedly. "Lady Florry—"

"Yes," he panted, "went up to her dressing-room. The door was locked. There must be—"

"Burglars!" I cried. "Quick, call the servants! Go up and guard that door, and send someone round to me!"

"Where are you going?"

"Under your windows," I cried, throwing open the one at the end of the room; and, springing out, I ran round to the front of the house, fully expecting to see one of the farm ladders reared up against the broad stone balcony which ran along the first floor. There it was, in the dim light, which was sufficiently strong for me to see that the window was open.

I did not hesitate a moment. "Burglars are always cowards," I reasoned, and I ran up the ladder and dashed to the window, thinking, though, that I should be awkwardly situated if our visitors had revolvers.

But no shot welcomed me as I stepped in, took a little match-box from my pocket, struck a light, and held it above my head. Nothing to be seen, so I stepped forward, lit the candles on the toilette-table, and peered about.

"Holloa!" cried a voice behind me, and Lord Gurtleigh sprang into the room. "Any-one there?"

"No," I said; "we are too late."

A minute's search proved that I was right, and then we turned to the door, which was carefully bolted on the inside; and, as we threw it open, there stood Brayson, the footman, and a couple of grooms, while voices behind us told that help was ready below, the gardeners and stablemen having been called up.

"Mind!" I shouted, running to the window, "keep back on the grass; there may be foot-prints there—I shall want to examine."

Then I stood thinking for a moment before issuing my orders as promptly as I could, sending grooms off mounted to summon the police, and then ride on to the railway station, and ask for help to detain any suspicious-looking people; while the gardeners went to scour the grounds and rouse the keepers, watchers, and people at the nearest farms.

It all proved labour in vain, and towards

morning I sat fagged out—after dispatching a telegram to the county town and another to London—talking to Lord and Lady Gurtleigh.

"I wouldn't care twopence," said the former, "but they've got jewels that are priceless. All poor Florry's pearls, which came from the Guicowar of Badjar Aman, and the old family diamonds."

"Don't fret, Dick, dear," said Lady Gurtleigh, quietly; "it's a great pity, but I will not mind. I daresay Charles Lester will get them back for me."

"Bless your faith," I cried, unable to repress a smile, in spite of my chagrin; "what a wonderful man you two think I am!"

"Well," said my old college chum, giving the table a rap with his fist, "wonderful or no, I do say this: if anyone can get them back it's dear old Charley here."

"Indeed!" I said; "then, my dear Lady Florry, try and be resigned, for your jewels are gone for ever, unless the detectives can run the scoundrels down."

"What, have you sent for the detectives?" cried Gurtleigh.

"Of course."

"How delightful!" cried Lady Gurtleigh, clapping her hands, "it will be like reading a romance."

"Humph!" ejaculated Gurtleigh, "she's not going to break her heart about the jewels."

"I should think not, indeed, dear," she cried, merrily. "They haven't killed us to get the nasty things. There now, you two poor, tired creatures are to smoke a cigar each, and I'll ring for some coffee."

She rang, and Brayson appeared, looking sadly troubled and bearing a tray.

"I took the liberty, my lady," he began.

"Oh, Brayson, how good of you!"

"Yes," said Lord Gurtleigh; "but, I say, Brayson, you should have brought the brandy, too."



"I RAN UP THE LADDER."

"I did, my lord, I have it outside here on a tray."

"All your doing, Charley," said Gurtleigh, as soon as we were alone; "that chap's getting quite a moral, as they say down here. Here's to you, dear boy, and I hope Florry is right."

The police were soon on the spot, and at once created a revolution among the servants, who threatened to leave in a body on finding that they were suspected; the upper housemaid being particularly demonstrative, and full of angry demands that the police sergeant should search her box.

But they did not trace the thieves, neither did they make any discoveries through the pawnbrokers or diamond merchants, and the months rolled on, and it was summer once again.

"It isn't your fault, old man," Gurtleigh said to me one day when they were down at the Castle again, after spending the winter in Italy, "and, look here, I taboo the topic. Whenever we meet, you begin going on about those confounded jewels. I don't mind now, and Florry doesn't mind, so let them rest. Anyone would think they were yours, you make so much fuss."

But I could only think about those lost stones, and Lady Gurtleigh's words that if they were found it would be by me. How I had pondered over their loss, and suspected different people, but only to feel guilty afterwards of misjudging them. For again and again I had felt convinced that the theft had been committed by someone who knew the place and our habits; hence I argued that it must have been one of the outdoor servants—groom, gardener, farm labourer, or perhaps even a keeper. I grew more convinced of this as time glided by; for it seemed to me that those jewels must be buried or hidden somewhere, with the thief waiting his time till he could find an opportunity for disposing of them safely. I don't know how it was, but the gardener excited most of my suspicion, and I used to go about the grounds at all hours, pondering upon likely places where they could have been buried—under newly planted trees, in vineries, under forcing frames, in pots or tubs in the conservatories. Then the labourers, the men who could be handy with ladders, had their turn in my suspicions, and, with my monomania increasing, I wandered about haystacks and farm buildings, peered under thatches and eaves, and pondered over the tiles and stones of floors.

"Those jewels never reached London!" I used to declare to myself as I wandered about with my walking-stick (one made of steel, heavily varnished, and so sharp at the point that I could use it as a probe to thrust into the ground amongst roots, or into stacks or thatches, in the hope of discovering the hidden gems). There were times when I told myself it was all imagination, especially when I was wearied out and felt that I had searched everywhere, and one night I thought that I would follow Lord Gurtleigh's advice, and give the matter up.

Result: I woke the next morning, and went down to the sea for my plunge in the deep hole beneath the cliffs, determined to proceed, and with a peculiar belief that sooner or later I should find those gems.

IV.

A GREAT change had resulted from my management, I must own. The people about the place had found out that I was not to be trifled with, and it was quite cheering to find how they settled down to the work. But I did not relax my vigilance. I was out early every morning and about the place, fine weather or foul, and for months past I had encountered smiles where there used to be scowls. One bright June morning I descended the cliff and reached the great chalk rock, where I undressed and stood for a few moments with the early sunshine full upon me, reflected from the high cliff, as I gazed down into the dark depths of the clear water before making my dive. Then I leaped right out, parted the cool, bracing fluid, and dived right down to see how long I could stay below before rising again, and repeated the performance, feeling for the moment what

an excellent diver I was, and directly after how feeble my efforts were as compared with those of a seal.

"I ought to have gone right to the bottom," I said to myself, as I was dressing; "who knows but what the jewels may have been thrown in there. Not a bad hiding-place," I mused; "but, no, not likely."

I walked back sharply, and, as of old, the rushing and splash in the well-house saluted me as I crossed the yard, thinking that, if it had not been for my old friend's heavy loss, I should have persuaded him to let me design new machinery for raising the water supply.

Brayson's words had so impressed me that it had grown into a habit to take my glass of cold water after my bath, and one was kept on a shelf on purpose for my use, one of the men thrusting in the winch-stop when a bucket was level, and filling the glass as a matter of course as soon as I was seen crossing the yard.

That morning, as I stood in the well-house, sipping the clear, cold fluid, and listening to the trickling and echoing splashing of the falling water, I gave quite a start, and involuntarily peered down into the horrible-looking black hole.

The next minute I had tossed off the remains of my draught, and hurried away, trembling lest my excitement should have been noted by the men; for, like an inspiration, the thought had come to me, "The jewels are hidden down there!"

Instead of turning into the gardens, as I generally did, I hurried in, and up to my own room, to finish dressing, but with my cheeks burning and temples throbbing, calling myself fool, madman; telling myself that it was impossible, improbable to a degree; that there were a million more likely places for the jewels to have been hidden, and that to throw them down there was to cast them away for ever.

But all these arguments were vain against the hourly growing feeling that I had at last hit upon the spot where the stolen gems were hidden.

Why had I not thought of that place before? I don't know. Perhaps it was too simple, perhaps too impossible. Suffice it, I never had till now, and the idea had suddenly become a fever, which went on increasing for quite a week, when, unable to combat the feeling longer, I gave way.

"There must be something in it," I said to myself, "or I should not be haunted in this fashion. Superstition? Perhaps; but whether it is that, or madness, or folly, I shall never rest till I have searched that well."

As soon as I had made up my mind to this, my first thought was to consult Lord Gurtleigh, but I cast that out at once.

"He'll ridicule it," I said. "I can't make him feel as I do"; and although I would have gladly given anything for a confidant, I felt that I must act alone, and keep my actions hidden—no easy task—from everyone about the place.

It was like a fit of insanity, quite a monomania; but I was determined, and from that hour began to think out my plans.

The simplest thing would have been to empty the well; but that was impossible. No amount of drawing water had the slightest effect, for the diggers had tapped the huge reservoirs extending beneath the mighty chalk range running east and west of the vast spur upon which the Castle stood dominating the sea. There could be no draining the well, and, even had it been possible, I should not have felt disposed to propose such a thing; for I wanted to keep my actions secret in case it was all a fancy engendered by the sight of the place.

That night, with a feeling of certainty that I had as good as found the jewels which had been hidden there for the reasons I had already settled, I made my way to the well-house after everyone had retired for the night.

I had provided myself with a lantern, matches, and a reel, upon which were a hundred yards of salmon line, from Lord Gurtleigh's tackle, and, lastly, a heavy plummet, beneath which I hung a little grapnel formed of hooks securely bound back to back.

The place looked very grim and repellent as I carefully closed the doors. All was silent and black, and when a drop of water dripped from the great cistern overhead it fell with a splash far below, which echoed from the slimy sides of the well in a peculiar way that was almost startling. But I was too hot upon my project, and, carefully lighting my lantern in one corner, I tried to keep it covered over till I had attached the end of the line to the lantern-ring, and swung it down over the side into the well.

"Nobody is likely to be watching the place," I thought, as I lowered the light for ten or a dozen feet; and then, as I looked over the rail, I began to search for

tion to my task; and at last the echoing sound seemed so loud that I twisted the line about the railing, and stole to the door and listened.

All was still, and I went back to peer down at the lantern swinging softly to and fro fully 50ft. down. And now, after loosening the line, I let it run out with the lantern descending, past the buckets, till I caught a faint gleam just beneath it, and then I could just see part of a wheel standing out of the black water, the beams which held it being beneath the surface, the light burning clearly and showing that there was no foul air.

As I rapidly wound the lantern up, I saw once more the two buckets about half-way down. Then, as I went on winding, they seemed to be descending, but of course it was the lantern coming up, and directly after I had it in my hand, untied it, and attached my grapnel. This I held over the well, and the weight ran it out rapidly. I heard it strike the water, and then on and on it went to what seemed to be a tremendous depth, before it touched bottom.

Then I began to drag here and there, pulling it in all directions, expecting every moment to feel a check, and when at last I did, my heart seemed to leap; but, as I lifted, it was only to find that a hook had caught against the bottom.

I kept this up for about a couple of hours, passing from one side of the draw wheels to the other after hauling up: but my efforts were in vain. I hooked nothing, and at last, in despair at my ill-success, I wound up, meaning to put the work off for another night, when all at once there was a sharp check, which nearly snatched the wheel out of my hand, and I knew that I had caught against one of the cross-beams that supported the lower wheel beneath the water. After a great deal of snatching and tugging the line was free, but at the expense of many yards left below, and my plummet and grapnel left sticking in the beam.

"Enough for to-night," I said to myself, opening my lantern and blowing out the candle.

Then throwing back the doors, I stood listening, fancying I had heard a step, but all was silent, and I crossed the yard, let myself in, and went to bed, but not to sleep. For I lay tossing from side to side, more convinced than ever that the jewels lay at the bottom of that well.

Why, I don't know: I only tell you what I thought, and, though I had dragged so unsuccessfully, and felt that I was not likely to recover them in that very primitive way, feeling as I did that the beams would prevent me from thoroughly searching the bottom, I was more determined than ever, and by sunrise had made up my mind what to do.

V.

I ROSE that morning an hour earlier than usual, and went down for my customary bathe.

As I reached the shore I searched about till I had found a couple of chalk boulders to my taste, and carried these to the top of the rock off which I regularly made my plunge, and laid them there.

"An Englishman ought to be as clever as a nigger," I said as I undressed, and I stooped and picked up one of the stones and gazed down into the deep water. "Seems a mad thing to do," I muttered; and then, feeling that if I hesitated I should fail, I took my leap, struck the water with a tremendous splash, and then went down like an arrow, lower and lower, till quite in dismay I unclasped my hands from the stone and rose rapidly to the surface. "It's easy enough," I thought, as my head shot into the sunshine; and, climbing back, I took the



"I LOWERED THE LIGHT."

what I expected to find, to wit, a string attached somewhere to the side—a string that I had settled in my own mind would be attached to the packet lowered down.

But I walked slowly round, examining carefully, and specially about the massive oaken cross-beams which supported the bucket wheel, and there was no result. I could see nothing but the stout rope, which rose up from the darkness, passed over the wheel by the cistern, and went down again into the black depths—two ropes, as it were, three feet apart, about the centre of the great shaft, nothing more.

I drew the lantern a little higher, then lowered it; and again more and more, but there was no string, and, bitterly disappointed, I let the light go down and down, stopping several times, and listening, in fear lest the clicking made by the salmon winch might draw atten-



"IT'S EASY ENOUGH."

other stone, contriving to glide off from close to the surface with the weight nipped between my knees.

This time I went down feet first till the water began to grow dark, when the stone slipped, and I again shot up, rather breathless, but encouraged by my success. I tried that experiment half-a-dozen times more, and continued it for a week, morning after morning, providing myself now with short lengths of line to tie round the stones to form a handle, and practising till I could seize a stone, plunge in with it, and let it drag me rapidly to the bottom, where I loosened my grasp after trying how long I could stay; and towards the last, after finding that I could easily stay down a minute, I always rose with some small stones or a handful of pebbles from the bottom.

"I can go East and turn pearl diver now," I said, "if everything else fails," and, quite satisfied with the confidence acquired by my skill in diving, I prepared one night for a venture which rather chilled me as the time approached.

It was a mad plan, and I knew it. I felt that I was quite a monomaniac; but I was blindly determined, and one night found me, lantern armed, and provided with matches, shut up in the well-house.

I had stolen out about one, with every nerve strung to the highest pitch, and a horrible feeling of dread sending a shiver through me; but I honestly believe that, if at that moment the danger of my task had been twice as great, the bulldog obstinacy within me would have carried me through.

But the danger was great enough, I well knew, as I set down on the humid floor the load I had brought, and then lit the lantern, and placed it on the framework of the great winch. Then lighting a piece of wax candle, I fixed that on the other side of the well by letting a little of the wax drip on the stout rail.

"So far so good," I said to myself, as I resolutely drove back horrible suggestions, set my teeth, and threw off the ulster I wore, to stand ready in an old football jersey and drawers.

I had thought out my plans to the smallest minutiae, and made all my calculations; so that, feeling that my only chance for carrying out my task successfully was

by going straight on without hesitation, I raised the load I had brought one by one—a couple of fifty-six pound weights, and after seeing that the stop was in the winch, placed them ready in one of the buckets which I had drawn up level with the rail. Then, fastening a string to the lantern, I lowered it down till it was about 5ft. from the water, fastened the string, and taking out the stop, let the first bucket run down with the weights till I heard it kiss the water with a hollow, echoing splash. As the sound arose, I thrust the stop into the cogs of the winch once more, and the bucket was stopped, as I could see, half in the water.

The next task was perilous, but nothing I felt to what was to come, as, mounting the rail, and climbing out on the apparatus, I seized one rope, reached out, caught the other, twisted my leg round, hung for a moment over the shaft, which looked, if anything, more horrible from the dim light below, and let myself glide rapidly down.

It was the task of a very few moments, but long enough for me to be attacked by thoughts such as—suppose the rope broke—suppose the air was foul down below—suppose I could not get back to the surface—answers to which came at once, for I knew that the rope would bear double my weight; that the lantern would not have burned in foul air; and

that, as to returning, I had but to stand in the bucket when I reached it, and draw myself up by hauling the other rope.

No—impossible; I had fixed the machinery with the stop. The thought unnerved me for the moment, and then I laughed, as I recalled how often I had climbed a rope. Then I was level with the swinging lantern, my feet touched the water close by the partly-submerged lower wheel, and I checked myself to feel about and find, as I had anticipated, a broad resting-place, just below the surface, composed of slippery cross-beams.

Here I stopped for a few moments thinking—not hesitating—as to which side I should descend. And now, in spite of the dogged courage within me, I felt in full force the terrible risk I was about to run. It was one thing to plunge down into the open sea in broad daylight, holding one of those boulders; another to take a fifty-six pound weight from that bucket close by me, plant it by me on the beam, thrust my foot through the ring right up to my instep, and then lower myself off and let that weight drag me down into those horrible, cold, black depths.

I shuddered with the shock of dread which ran through me, and then, snapping my teeth together like an angry dog, I uttered a low laugh, which startled me again, as in my desperate fit I said:—

"Bah, what a poor soldier I should have made! Common workmen go through such risks every day as a matter of course. The jewels or——"

I did not finish my sentence, but bent down as I held on by the rope, and took one of the weights out of the bucket close by me; the water washing about and whishing against the slimy walls as if it were swarming with live creatures, disturbed by my coming, and ascending rapidly from the depths to attack the intruder upon their home.

My foot glided along over the oaken beam on which I stood, but I held on by the rope and recovered myself, planted the weight down in the water by my feet, and holding up the ring thrust my right foot through close up to the instep.

"That will do," I thought, as I raised my toes, feeling that if I descended carefully it would not slip off till

I lowered the fore part of my foot. "Now, lad, no silly fancies," I muttered. "A few long breaths, then one deep inhalation; down you go rapidly; then feel about for a minute and a half, find the package, slip your foot out of the ring—no, you will be holding it then—keep your hands over your head in case you come up under the beam, and then hurrah for to-morrow!"

It was a childish way of addressing myself, perhaps; but I felt bound to treat the matter lightly, so as to cloak the peril from my too active brain.

"Ready?" I said, as I kept on breathing slowly and deeply, preparatory to taking the long, deep, lasting breath.

"Yes," I said, mentally, and changing my hold to the other rope, I was about to lower myself into a sitting position on the beam, drawing that deep breath the while, when like lightning came the thought: "Suppose it is your last!" for a thrill shot down my left arm right to my heart, and I sprang back to my erect position, wondering as the thrill went on.

Were my muscles quivering like that? No; it was the rope which I held in my hand, literally throbbing. I looked up, and there, far above me, dimly visible by the light of the candle I had left burning, I could see something dark reaching out from the woodwork to the rope. The throbbing went on violently, and before I could grasp what it meant, the rope gave way in my hand, extinguishing the lantern in its fall; there was a peculiar rushing in the water, I lost my balance, my foot in the iron ring felt as if snatched off the slippery beam, and I was rushing down through the black water rapidly towards the bottom.

VI.

I suppose I must have struck out involuntarily, and in the act, as the water thundered in my ears and literally jarred me as if blows had been struck over my head, the weight glided from my foot and I rose to the surface choking, panting, and grasping wildly at the first object I touched. It was a rope, and it gave way beneath my grasp. I caught at something again. It was a wheel and it turned round, but as strange sounds, shouts, and cries reached my ears, I got hold of the cross-beam, and somehow, by the help of the wheel, managed to reach my old position, but crouching down and holding on for dear life.

"Below there!" shouted a familiar voice, but hollow and strange, "who is it?"

"I! Help! Help!" I gasped, now thoroughly unnerved.

"Right; can you hold on till we send you down a rope?"

I did not answer for a few moments as I strove to realize my chances.



"I LOOKED UP."



"Yes," I said, hoarsely. "Don't be long."

It seemed an age before the rope came, and during the terrible waiting time I listened to words of encouragement, mingled with stern orders, delivered in Lord Gurtleigh's voice.

Then came a cheer, and he shouted to me:—

"Hold on, lad! Rope's being rigged over the wheel. I'm coming down."

"No, no," I shouted, rousing myself now from the apathy into which I had been fast sinking. "Send it down, and I'll make it fast."

Soon after a lantern began to descend, and by its light I saw the loop of a rope gradually glide lower and lower till it reached me, when I was so numbed and cramped that I had hard work to get it over my head and arms. But I succeeded, and it must have spun round and tightened about my chest as I was hoisted up, for I was quite unable to help myself, and insensible by the time I reached the top.

When I opened my eyes again with an understanding brain, my old friend was seated by my bedside; and, after I had assured him that I was not going to die, he told me that he had been roused up by the head keeper throwing shots at his window; and, upon his opening it, the man told him that there was something wrong, for, passing near the back of the buildings, he had seen a light in the well-house through the little window.

"We were only just in time, Charley. Caught the scoundrel with the knife in his hand. He had just cut through the rope."

"Who—who was it?" I cried.

"Why, Brayson, of course!"

"Then he was the thief!" I cried, excitedly; "and the jewels are there."

"Jewels? Down the well? You were after them?"

"Of course," I said, and I told him all.

"Well," he said, as I finished my brief narrative, "I have heard about men being fit for Colney Hatch, and you're one!"

"Never mind that," I said, "if Lady Florry gets back her gems."

"And old Brayson is hung for trying to murder you," said Lord Gurtleigh. "But, I say, old fellow, I'm glad I came."

But Brayson was not hung: he only had a taste of penal servitude for the robbery of the jewels and also of some valuable plate, two packages secured in fine wire netting being brought up after proper dredging arrangements had been made.

As for myself, I was none the worse for my submersion, save that my nerves were unsteady for some time, especially when I used to lie and think:—

"Suppose that keeper had not seen the light!"

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OUT



WILL
SURELY
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"I hereby certify that I have submitted to a careful Examination and Chemical Analysis a sample, purchased by myself, from the stock of a well-known firm of Wholesale Druggists, of the preparation known as 'Koko for the Hair.'

"I have found nothing in this preparation which could be injurious either to the head or hair, and the results of the Analysis lead me to pronounce 'Koko for the Hair' a pleasant dressing, which would undoubtedly be advantageous in many cases. I discovered in the preparation no ingredients of the nature of a colouring matter or dye.

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Miss A. BULL, 9, Westfield Road, Shipley, Yorks, says: "I like 'Koko' better than any preparation I ever used. There is no stickiness whatever after using it, and my hair is as nice and soft as though just washed. My hair has come off very much for years, but I must say since using 'Koko' it has not done so half as much."

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Mr. HENRY WESTLAND, of Toole's Theatre, Strand, W.C., writes: "'Koko' will certainly arrest the falling off of the hair, strengthen and increase its growth. I have recommended it to many friends, and in every case it has given great satisfaction."

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